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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the annual U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue begins this week, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) urges President Obama, Secretary Kerry and other U.S. officials to raise during discussions with their Chinese counterparts the cases of prominent religious prisoners and human rights lawyers in China. The continued confinement of thousands of political and religious prisoners in China violates that nation's international obligations and its constitutional protections for human rights and religious freedom

"The Administration needs to be a strong voice for the voiceless and vulnerable in China," said Katrina Lantos Swett, USCIRF's Chair. "China's imprisoned dissidents stand peacefully for freedom and the rule of law, but Beijing views them as enemies of the state. These continuing human rights abuses fundamentally are at odds with international legal standards that China is obliged to respect. China's continued repression of dissent and restrictions on religious freedom cannot but affect our hopes of finding common ground between our two countries on other important global concerns."

Dr. Swett concluded, "Because President Xi Jinping's idea of a 'Chinese Dream' is a nightmare for those who dare to stand up for human rights, we urge Secretary Kerry to raise prominently the cases of prisoners of conscience."

USCIRF's 2013 [Annual Report](#) found that poor religious freedom conditions in China have deteriorated significantly, particularly for Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims. To stem the growth of independent Catholic and Protestant groups, the government has detained and arrested leaders, forcibly closed churches, and selected Catholic bishops without the approval of the Vatican. The Falun Gong and other groups deemed "evil cults" face long-term imprisonments, forced renunciations of faith, and torture in detention.

[CLICK HERE](#) for the descriptions and photos of some of those featured in USCIRF's 2013 Annual Report. They represent the many prisoners detained in Chinese jails because of their religious activities or religious freedom advocacy.